

Guidelines for SIC Advocacy with Elected Officials

School Improvement Councils are constantly seeking new avenues to improve their local school in particular and public education in general. Entering into a dialogue with those elected officials who are responsible for creating public education policy and practice is one of the avenues an SIC may decide to travel.

All citizens have the right to speak out about any issues they choose with their elected officials. However, there are some ethical concerns when citizens who are members of a body convened by the government such as an SIC speak out on political issues, especially if those issues are seen as partisan. To help SICs stay within ethical boundaries when planning advocacy activities SC-SIC has prepared the following guidelines.

- SIC members do not give up their First Amendment rights as public citizens when they are elected or appointed to the SIC, however; they must be aware of their obligations as council members when speaking publicly on political issues. Remember that sometimes it isn't WHAT you say but HOW you say it.
- Check with your district office to determine if there is policy in place regarding the involvement of SICs in advocacy efforts with elected officials.
- The SIC's core responsibility is the school improvement plan. Issues being advocated by the SIC should be relevant to the improvement of the school.
- SICs may advocate for the passage or defeat of legislation.
- SICs may pass resolutions if they choose to do so.
- SICs may present information about policy issues as long as they present all sides of the issues. If information regarding an issue is disseminated for one point of view, the SIC must be prepared to disseminate information from others who have a differing view.
- Public money must not be spent to advocate for the passage or defeat of a ballot measure (such as a candidate election or bond referendum). SICs typically have no budget and must be sure that they do not use school supplies, postage, computers, or other equipment to distribute information on ballot measures.
- The PTA/O or Booster Club, etc., is not a government body and may advocate for politically sensitive topics as they choose; however, no group may spend more than \$500 advocating the passage or defeat of legislation through direct communication with the General Assembly unless they register with the South Carolina State Ethics Commission.
- SICs do not endorse candidates for public office. They may provide opportunities for candidates to present their positions, such as a school board candidate forum. SICs must ensure that ALL candidates have an equal opportunity to participate.
- Citizens have the right and the responsibility to communicate their positions regarding public education to their elected officials. If the SIC has a concern about speaking out publicly as a group, they may opt to send information as a group of individuals rather than as the official SIC.

Please contact the SC-SIC office at 800-868-2232 with questions or comments. All SC citizens should contact their elected officials to express their thoughts, concerns and needs regarding public education. Public participation in government keeps our democracy strong!

Approved November 18, 2005 by SC-SIC Board of Trustees